

EDUCATION WEEK

Mich. Governor Wants New Graduation Requirements to Promote Career Tech Ed.

By Jackie Zubrzycki on July 3, 2017 3:59 PM

A new proposal from Michigan's governor, Republican Rick Snyder, encourages the state to change graduation requirements to encourage more students to take career and technical education courses.

Last week, Snyder called on legislators to change requirements for the state's public schools to require high schoolers to take a "career readiness" course and middle schoolers to take an exploratory career course. Snyder also recommended that schools use career-planning programs, improve career counseling, help students in career and technical education programs earn credentials, and hire more career and tech instructors.

In a statement, Snyder says, "we call this effort the Michigan Career Pathways Alliance. We are bringing together economic developers, employers, and educators, as well as K-12 districts and higher education institutions with union leaders and businesses."

It's just one indication of interest in the state in creating more space for high schoolers to take career and technical education courses: Michigan's House of Representatives has already voted to replace language and art requirements in the state with a 21st century skills requirement that could include art, computer science, coding, or career and technical education.

Such efforts have also raised concerns: Advocates for foreign languages, for instance, say they offer a way for students to learn about the world and were opposed to replacing the language requirement with career and technical education. And historically, there have also been concerns that nonwhite students and students from lower-income families are "tracked" into career and technical education programs instead of being offered academic options.

9&10 News, a northern Michigan television-news program, interviewed a local superintendent, Tim Hall, who supported the measure: "It became clear that the state and the nation still needs skill (sic) trades people; not every student is wanting to go to college," he told the station.

Snyder isn't the only politician looking to encourage young people to focus on their careers. In Chicago, Mayor Rahm Emanuel proposed requiring students to draft post-graduation plans before they receive diplomas. And President Donald Trump recently announced more funds for high school apprenticeship programs.

New Michigan Alliance Provides Model for Education, Employment, Empowerment

June 29, 2017 by Jeffrey M. Krause - SME Executive Director and CEO

Gov. Rick Snyder and the State of Michigan announced the Michigan Career Pathway Alliance this week. It creates a framework that builds and strengthens opportunities for students pursuing career and technical education. I'm impressed and enthusiastically endorse the alliance, which will benefit from partnerships and collaboration with business, education and industry organizations.

Snyder said that we all have an important role in making sure every student has the opportunity to explore multiple pathways to find a career that matches their interests and goals. And, I couldn't agree more.

Why? Because Michigan, like much of the nation, is at a crossroads: manufacturing is increasingly healthy even as good, meaningful jobs are going unfilled because there are not enough skilled, qualified candidates. It's a challenge for industry, education, and certainly for a state once a global center of manufacturing.

Knowing these challenges, 90 groups from labor, business and education met for months to consider needs – and potential solutions. Michigan students need work and mentoring opportunities, along with courses and training that lead to recognized credentials and job opportunity. Schools need qualified, experienced instructors. Industry needs the skill, ability and passion required by today's advanced manufacturing.

The new Alliance addresses all of those challenges, offering a comprehensive, meaningful path to resolution.

I've concluded that it's Michigan's young people who will benefit the most. American manufacturing has always offered workers an opportunity for well-paid jobs and solid futures – and it's more true now than ever. In 2015, the average annual compensation for manufacturing employees was \$81,289 including benefits. Teachers, parents, counselors and students need to know about and share the opportunities available for those bright, creative young people who don't always want to pursue a college program.

Michigan has seen a resurgence in manufacturing, and the future is bright for industry, enterprise and our energetic employees going forward. Manufacturing workers are an integral part of Michigan's economy – and indeed the nation's economy. They always have been, and initiatives like the Michigan Career Pathway Alliance ensure that same strength and solid future.

I'd encourage other states to take a closer look at this initiative!

Jeff Krause is the CEO and executive director of SME, a nonprofit manufacturing association. He is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the organization, while leading day-to-day operations and working closely with customers and stakeholders to enable growth.